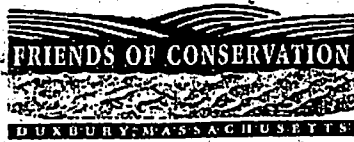


## CONSERVATION



### Conservation: Gain or Drain?

Let's talk about taxes. The Town proposes to buy 375 acres of conservation land at a special town meeting on June 1. Certainly there are environmental, recreational, and even cultural reasons to vote for open space acquisition, but let's concentrate on the financial side.

One of the arguments against conservation is that buying land for open space takes it off the tax rolls. That's irrelevant in the case of Camp Wing, a charitable organization that doesn't pay taxes now. The other 3 properties do pay taxes, but it can be demonstrated that in the long run it is less expensive to buy them for conservation than to allow them to be developed.

There is a common misconception that residential development is needed "to keep our taxes from going through the roof." The truth is that Duxbury's kind of residential development is precisely what does make taxes go up. Although new houses bring new tax revenues, they also require increased expenditures for more new roads, water service, fire and police protection, and education. Typically, residential units cost the Town more in services than they provide in tax dollars. The disparity is greatest in the newer subdivisions, which tend to attract young families. A recent study calculates that new homes will cost the Town \$1.78 in services for every \$1 they pay in real estate and excise taxes. Residential development is emphatically NOT the way to control taxes.

The deficit from residential units is made up by other types of taxes, state aid, and user fees, all of which have their limits. Commercial properties, relatively few in Duxbury, contribute more in taxes than they require in services. Farm lands, many of which have been lost to

development, also provide a net gain. Open space pays no taxes but requires very few services and, in Duxbury, cranberry bogs on Conservation lands contributed \$200,000 to the General Fund last year.

Conservation is a good investment. Unlike most things we buy, land never loses its value, never has to be repaired, and doesn't cost much to maintain. The land proposed will cost 2.2 million dollars, or approximately \$40 on the average tax bill. It's more difficult to put a dollar value on the benefits: open space protects our water supply, prevents flooding, preserves natural resources, protects wildlife, enhances opportunities for recreation, increases property values, and preserves the rural character of the Town.

No one is proposing that Duxbury stop growing, or that we buy all of the 2600 acres of developable open space remaining in town. No one regrets our excellent schools, or the families they bring—a town without children would be a sad place indeed. But June 1 is an opportunity to balance development with carefully planned open space acquisition for our fiscal, as well as environmental, well-being.

You must vote TWICE for conservation: at the Special Town Meeting June 1, and on the ballot question June 13. There will be "open houses" at the 4 parcels on 2 Sundays, May 24 and 31, from 1-4 pm. To participate in Friends of Conservation, contact us at PO Box 1528 or call Dot Baker (934-2302) or Kay Foster (934-2663).